



# A Smooth Launch Lays the Foundation for Precision Landings

## The Benefits of the Program Startup Workshop

*Capt. CJ Jaynes, USN ■ Mike Kotzian ■ Melissa Losson ■ Duane Mallicoat ■ Dan Nash ■ Mary Redshaw ■ Tim Simpson*

Initiating a program, no matter its assigned acquisition category, is a major event. With the pressures of cost and schedule being an immediate concern, the perceived expectation is for a program to hit the ground running. As a result, a program's first task is typically to develop a strategic plan so that everyone knows in which direction the program needs to go in order to meet its identified goals and priorities. But a program is better served by delaying this flurry of activity. In fact, a program's leadership should first examine their program management toolbox and rely upon a fairly recent approach that has been shown to directly correlate to improved program performance from the very beginning of program initiation: the program startup workshop. This article discusses how the program startup workshop helped the Joint Precision Approach Landing System program have a smooth start.

### The JPALS Program

Shipboard landings are challenging under the best condition. To conduct operations at night or in reduced-visibility weather conditions, U.S. naval aviators rely on proven shipboard air traffic control systems to safely reach the deck. Unfortunately, those aging air traffic control systems are costly to maintain because the commercially produced technology they rely upon continually become obsolete. Additionally, the systems can also act as beacons of radiated energy detectable by enemy forces at extreme distances.

**Jaynes** is the program manager for PMA 213. **Kotzian** is a DAU professor of acquisition management. **Losson** is the JPALS program manager for Raytheon. **Mallicoat** is a DAU professor of life cycle logistics and acquisition management. **Nash** is the JPALS program manager for Rockwell Collins. **Redshaw** is a DAU professor of systems engineering. **Simpson** is a DAU professor of acquisition management and life cycle logistics.

The JPALS program (Acquisition Category ID) was initiated to reduce life cycle costs, increase naval aviator safety, and decrease the operating electronic footprint associated with recovering aircraft. The JPALS capabilities development document defines two increments, with increment one being the ship-based (naval) variant.

As the next-generation precision-approach landing system—scheduled for an initial operating capability in late 2014—JPALS will leverage GPS technology to provide reliable landing guidance— accurate up to less than one meter—for sea-based fixed and rotary wing aircraft during all weather conditions. Such accuracy is 22 times and 94 times greater than the targeting accuracies provided by the Joint Standoff Weapon and the Joint Direct Attack Munition, respectively. The JPALS signal will provide two additional advantages: It is highly jam-resistant, and it has a low probability of intercept. It is unlikely that an enemy will be able to detect the JPALS sea-based signal and trace it back to its origin—thereby allowing naval platforms to eliminate the electronically radiated beacon from existing shipboard air traffic control systems. In order to provide this interoperable JPALS solution to the fleet on time and within cost objectives, the JPALS integrate product team (IPT) recognized the need to leverage innovative acquisition business practices.

## The Program Startup Workshop

As part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007, Section 853(a) (Strategy) requires the secretary of defense to devise a comprehensive strategy for enhancing the role of Department of Defense program managers in developing and carrying out defense acquisition programs. In an August 2007 report to Congress, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics addressed specific DoD initiatives to provide support and incentives for current and future PMs. One initiative is the program startup workshop.

According to the OUSD(AT&L) report, program startup workshop are “designed to accelerate alignment of the government and contractor program management teams within the first three to six weeks after contract start.” A program startup workshop can “address typical startup issues in an informed manner by establishing a common framework for program execution as early as practical rather than having each party independently establish their procedures.” JPALS is one of several DoD acquisition programs that have recently used the program startup workshop to accomplish such team alignment.

## Is Your Team a Team?

Building an effective team remains one of the most critical actions any PM will undertake. Unfortunately, teambuilding is often left to chance, as organizations often do not implement a strategic plan to ensure they get the most from a newly formed team. A core foundation of the program startup workshop philosophy is early formation of collabora-

tive processes that facilitate a team’s government-industry integration and mutual commitment to program success. Conducting a program startup workshop allows government and industry partners to align goals, processes, and tools from their respective organization into a joint government and industry IPT, ensuring all parties are on the same page. Ideally, representatives from all functional areas across the program’s enterprise are represented and contribute from the very beginning.

All teams go through inevitable stages in order to grow, accept challenges, plan work, tackle problems, find solutions, and deliver results. The most widely accepted model characterizing those necessary teaming stages is known as the “FSNP” model first advocated by Bruce Tuckman in 1965. While variations of this classic model have subsequently surfaced, the following four stages are widely accepted as the stages through which teams progress:

- Forming—individuals come together, get to know one another, and start to form the team in order to agree on goals and tackle the tasks.
- Storming—typically a chaotic time in which different ideas compete for consideration and individuals vie for leadership roles.
- Norming—team members adjust their behavior “for the good of the team” by agreeing on rules, procedures, values, etc., based on a willingness to trust.
- Performing—team members become interdependent and find ways to get the job done smoothly, efficiently, and effectively.

The storming stage is typically the most difficult through which to navigate, and it frequently leads to team dysfunction. After a team is able to make the leap into the norming and performing stages, significant changes to such factors as team composition, task assignment, or leadership have the potential to throw the team back into the storming stage. Team development then cycles back to the beginning of the process, resulting in potential negative impacts to a program’s schedule and/or cost estimate. A program startup workshop is one way to ensure new acquisition program offices can form a strong team before the unavoidable storming phase takes over.

Why all this talk about teams? Well, teaming is what program startup workshops are all about. A workshop seeks to improve the execution of acquisition programs by fostering the formation of a cohesive government-industry partnership.

A tailored program startup workshop offers several benefits. The workshop provides an opportunity to engage both the government and industry teams on effective program startup actions; it provides an environment to grow trust, collaboration, teamwork, and communication; and—most important—it helps to establish a solid foundation upon which to execute a successful program. Ideally, program

startup workshops are held three to six weeks after a contract award and last three to five days. However, program startup workshops can be held at virtually any program stage if teaming improvement is sought.

### **The JPALS Workshop**

It was against this backdrop that Naval Air Systems Command PMA 213 (Naval Air Traffic Management Systems Program Office) turned to the Defense Acquisition University Mid-Atlantic Region to hold a three-day JPALS program startup workshop. Navy Capt. CJ Jaynes, the JPALS program manager and contributor to this article, felt a program startup workshop would provide immediate benefits to the JPALS program, which had just been awarded the increment 1A system development and demonstration contract.

## **A program startup workshop should be part of a PM's toolkit to enhance program success by more efficiently navigating through the inevitable storming phase to become a high-performance team.**

The program startup workshop was to provide a tool to facilitate and accelerate the transition of the JPALS government-industry IPT through the initial forming stage of team development. As noted previously, the storming phase is a usual part of a group's development, and use of the program startup workshop will not eliminate entirely the group conflicts that are typical of the phase. However, by using the program startup workshop to strengthen roles and responsibilities as well as arrive at agreed-upon rules and procedures (indicative of the norming phase), the JPALS government-industry team was much better positioned to immediately begin working as a committed and unified team.

Participants in the workshop included the program manager, principal deputy program manager, deputy program manager for landing systems, the JPALS increment 1A integrated product team leader, and key team members from the PMA 213. Other participants included program managers and key team members from Raytheon and Rockwell Collins; and the program integrator from Defense Contract Management Agency.

The JPALS program startup workshop agenda included an array of topics designed to ensure the government-industry team members established processes for communication and collaboration while also covering topics that would help JPALS prepare for the program's upcoming integrated baseline review. The agenda included "soft" topics to facilitate teaming, such as a Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® personality analysis, conflict resolution, and external and government-industry communication plans. Additionally, "hard" agenda topics were covered that more closely associated with an acquisition focus, such as IPT roles and responsibilities; an integrated baseline review roadmap; system readiness review/system functional review checklist and lessons learned; and program metrics, including leading indicators. While the JPALS program startup workshop agenda was typical for a workshop, a PM can tailor the agenda to satisfy his or her specific goals in order to meet a program's unique challenges.

### **Workshop Expectations**

Unclear expectations contribute to and prolong a team's storming phase. As government and industry PMs communicate their management expectations to the IPTs, it is not uncommon that differences of opinion between the government and industry team members may arise and create friction in a newly established working environment. Facilitation and general guidance—"rules of the road" provided to the program startup workshop attendees—help a newly formed team overcome typical stumbling blocks and increase the potential for program success. The program startup workshop provides a way for the government and industry PMs to establish joint expectations and to flow these expectations down to the individual IPT for implementation—overcoming barriers to effective teambuilding caused by unclear expectations.

So what were the JPALS program startup workshop expectations? Jaynes established the following goals for the JPALS program startup workshop:

- Industry-government team members would become familiar with each other on both a professional and personal basis.
- Standards would be set on how the team will operate and conduct themselves.
- IPTs would become aligned with the PM's vision for success.

Independently, managers from the industry partner organization outlined a surprisingly similar set of expectations. Melissa Losson, the JPALS PM for Raytheon and a contributor to this article, stated that her expectations were for increased team communications, the formation of understood ground rules, a continuation of the JPALS team formation and maturation, and the establishment of personal relationships. Dan Nash, the JPALS PM from Rockwell Collins and a contributor to this article, arrived with expectations to meet and build relationships with JPALS team counterparts from

Raytheon and PMA 213, and thus, hoped to understand how the larger JPALS team would work effectively together to achieve success.

The PMs from both Raytheon and Rockwell Collins welcomed the opportunity to hear firsthand the government's expectations, and to align the activities of all three organizations to achieve common success. Jaynes' use of a program startup workshop provided the forum to get the constituent elements of the JPALS team on the same page very early in the process, and it allowed managers from all three organizations to engage in a proactive, collaborative team environment

### **JPALS Workshop Outcomes**

At the completion of the three-day JPALS program startup workshop, the outcomes could be grouped along the lines of three general themes. First, members across the JPALS IPT gained a better understanding of the PMA 213, Raytheon, and Rockwell Collins roles and responsibilities; and what the counterparts in each of the organizations expected of each other. Indicative of the norming team stage, there was a clarification of rules and procedures regarding the government-industry teaming concept. The program startup workshop emphasis on teambuilding and team interactions laid a solid foundation for future communications and information flow.

"I was impressed with how everyone was truly integrated on JPALS," said Losson.

Second, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator proved to be a good starting point for team discussions and understanding members' perspectives. Myers-Briggs is widely used to identify and describe an individual's personality type and approach to problems. With the Myers-Briggs results, the JPALS government-industry team was better positioned to improve team interaction and development based on individual interpersonal communication preferences. Use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator provided a better understanding of different approaches to information processing, communication, and problem solving. It also established a basis for creating more efficient communication techniques that helped accelerate the team-building process. Understanding of other perspectives facilitated the formation of better partnerships and healthier working relationships.

The third general outcome concerned IPTs. A firmer understanding was gained regarding how IPTs within the program were to function and interact for enhanced vertical and horizontal communication. Several of the team members met for the first time at the program startup workshop, so the event proved a great opportunity for IPT members to build relationships and define their team processes. Having a template for the IPTs to use in order to define rules, roles, and responsibilities greatly facilitated the process. One such template topic (identify perceived challenges) prompted meaningful

conversations that uncovered concerns many of the team members had not previously considered.

### **Is it Worthwhile?**

Was the JPALS program startup workshop worthwhile? When asked this question, Jaynes stated: "The Program Startup Workshop accelerated the team-building process and has enabled Team JPALS to start out the gate sprinting. Personal relationships were established that facilitated improved professional relationships. We understand our differences, and are able to resolve issues more efficiently and move on to the next challenge. Everyone understands that we are Team JPALS, and we will succeed or fail as a team."

The JPALS team also saw the value of the program startup workshop as part of a program's continuing support to performance throughout all phases of the defense acquisition framework.

"Programs often run for years with several leadership changes. When a program is going through a major transition or being restructured, a tailored [program startup workshop] would be an opportune way to roll out the revised program vision and priorities. In this situation, the [program startup workshop] would accelerate the transition and help reduce the resistance that often occurs when there is a change," said Losson.

The program startup workshop enabled IPT leaders to give the program a strong beginning by aligning government and industry team members; clarifying management issues; developing an integrated baseline review execution plan; establishing a risk management process; and arriving at a consensus for IPT charters, responsibilities, and authority.

"Having run numerous large DoD [system development and demonstration] programs, this is the first time I had attended a program startup workshop. I highly recommend all programs of this size conduct a program startup workshop upfront in order to ensure the entire team is sensitized to leadership expectations and has the opportunity to form lasting and productive relationships with their industry and government counterparts," said Nash.

The JPALS program startup workshop met the OUSD(AT&L) goal of early team alignment and mutual commitment to enhance program success. Regardless of a program's phase within the acquisition process, a program startup workshop should be part of a PM's toolkit to enhance program success by more efficiently navigating through the inevitable storming phase to become a high-performance team.

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**The authors welcome comments and questions and can be contacted at [cj.jaynes@navy.mil](mailto:cj.jaynes@navy.mil), [mike.kotzian@dau.mil](mailto:mike.kotzian@dau.mil), [mmlossen@raytheon.com](mailto:mmlossen@raytheon.com), [duane.mallicoat@dau.mil](mailto:duane.mallicoat@dau.mil), [denash@rockwellcollins.com](mailto:denash@rockwellcollins.com), [mary.redshaw@dau.mil](mailto:mary.redshaw@dau.mil), and [tim.simpson@dau.mil](mailto:tim.simpson@dau.mil).**